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Date: Fri, 26 Mar 1999 09:24:27 -0800
To: lipman@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov
From: "Patrick O. Brown" <pbrown@cmgm.stanford.edu>
Subject: FYI: dialog with Richard Smith (editor of BMJ)
Cc: Harold_Varmus@nih.gov

Hi David,

FYI,

Following the ill-advised email rant for which you appropriately scolded me, I've had a couple of exchanges with Richard Smith, editor of the British Medical Journal, who I think would be a very good allie. He's been thinking about and even experimenting with eprints for a while, and I think could give us advice and help on many levels, including perhaps with the publishing world and bringing in the European community.

Pat

>Date: Fri, 26 Mar 1999 09:17:06 -0800
>To: Richard Smith <rsmith@bmjgroup.com>
>From: "Patrick O. Brown" <pbrown@cmgm.stanford.edu>
>Subject: Re: fwd: eprint brouhaha
>Cc:
>Bcc: pbrown
>X-Attachments:
>
>Hi Richard,
>
>I agree with everything you say here.
>
>We've been thinking extensively about new models for peer review, which
>clearly warrants reinvention.
>
>I for one strongly favor a model in which all reviews are signed and
>posted as links from the publication (a model that I know BMJ has been
>interested in for quite a while), and in which reviewers, in addition to
>providing constructive suggestions to the author, and critical commentary,
>use a formalism to categorize all papers according to the fields to which
>they have something to contribute, and to stratify them according to the
>level of interest they warrant in each of those fields.
>
>I also think it's essential to keep the decision to publish a work
>independent of the review process. That is, the work should be published
>(made publicly available and permanently archived and citable), as soon as
>it passes a cursory screen for appropriateness (i.e. that it is ostensibly
>scientific, and does not contain commercial advertising, pornography,
>personal or racist attacks, etc.), FOLLOWED BY a review process that
>serves to provide constructive comments back to the authors, critical
>commentary to assist readers and potential secondary publishers, and a

> formal stratification and categorization as above, to help readers
> assemble the works they want to read into their individual "virtual
> journals". We can also use the eprint system to experiment with other
> ways of categorizing, stratifying and adding value to publications by
> providing them in parallel with whatever peer review mechanism we start
> with. This will allow readers to choose what works best for them. I'm
> sure other publishers, societies, etc., will invent their own systems for
> helping readers find what they want from the eprint server, and the
> competition will quickly generate new and useful resources for readers.
>
> I would love to share ideas and brainstorm with you about peer review.
> The empirical studies you've been doing are exactly what is needed. The
> eprint system will give us an opportunity to collect data for
> extending these studies (and also empirical studies of how readers use the
> scientific literature, etc.) on a much larger scale, and it would be great
> to talk with you about how we might do such studies.
>
> As for the nationalism issue, I'm sure you are right. I don't think there
> is any intention for the US to dominate, only to facilitate. How to
> arrange participation of other countries is not trivial. My feeling is
> that if it is clear that the US is not dominating or dictating what anyone
> should do, just providing a resource that scientists can choose to use, or
> not, scientists will be drawn to it, irrespective of their nationality, if
> it's good. Having a mechanism in which there is a very low barrier to
> publication in the eprint system, and a secondary review that stratifies
> and marks up a paper rather than rejecting it, will at least make it clear
> that the US or the NIH are not going to be arbitrarily excluding work from
> the system. And non-US societies can choose to provide their own
> independent review system for papers in the eprint server, so the US role
> can be almost entirely transparent and facilitatory.
>
> The language issue is more complex, but having all the literature in a
> common electronic format opens up in principle the possibility of
> developing and using specialized natural language translation software to
> translate scientific text into other languages (mostly from English to
> other languages, but also the reverse and between non-English languages).
> This could be a real opportunity to internationalize science more than it
> has been. And of course lowering the economic barriers to access to the
> scientific literature and dialog will help a lot. (No more relying on old
> hand me down journals in poorer countries). And certainly the
> copyright-free nature of the system will make it easier for publishers or
> societies to provide "manual" translation of selected articles into their
> own language.
>
> These comments are my own and do not represent the views or plans of the
> NIH or any other individual.
>
> I look forward to continuing this discussion with you.
>
> Best regards,
>
> Pat

>
>
>
>>Dear Pat,
>>
>>One way that I/we would like to help is with rethinking peer review. To
>>set up
>>a gigantic version of what journals do now would be a missed opportunity.
>>
>>You also need lots of non-US (and, indeed, non-Anglophone) input. A US
>>dominated model (even with irrefutable logic) will not go down well with
>>everybody at any time but particularly when NATO is bombing European cities.
>>
>>I'm up for reinventing the whole thing.
>>
>>Best wishes
>>
>>
>>Richard
>>
>>Patrick O. Brown wrote:
>>
>>> Hi Richard,
>>>
>>> Thanks for the message. I know who you are, even without the
>>> parenthetical explanation. I hope you didn't take offense at the
>>> argumentative tone of my message to Mike Keller and John Sack. I realize
>>> very well that BMJ is playing a leadership role in exploring new ways to
>>> publish results, observations and ideas in medicine, and I certainly did
>>> not consider you and Tony to be "reactionaries". Nevertheless, I sincerely
>>> believe that there is little chance that individual journals (print or
>>> electronic) will continue to be the vehicles publishing original research
>>> for long. This actually liberates them to focus on the great creative
>>> opportunity you identified in your reaction #3. After all, there are
>>> already journals that survive solely by adding value secondarily to work
>>> published in other journals, but they are currently slow and rather
>>> rudimentary. It would be great if you/Tony/ BMJ were actually willing to
>>> help think about how to handle peer review through the NIH eprint system.
>>> An alternative eprint system run by BMJ/Highwire might also be a good way
>>> to explore alternative models.
>>>
>>> I hope we can keep up an active and constructive dialog about this.
>>>
>>> Pat
>>>
>>> Dear Mike,
>>> >
>>> >We have various reactions to Godziklla (the NIH plan) here. They range
>>> >through:
>>> >
>>> >1. It's a brilliant idea that had to come
>>> >

>>> >2. It has an irrefutable logic
>>> >
>>> >3. Our journals can flourish in the age of Godzilla because we can stop
>>> >spending lots of time and resources processing scientific papers which
>>> >nobody much reads and concentrate on picking out interesting and valid
>>> >papers from the database and presenting them in a way that excites our
>>> >readers
>>> >
>>> >4. It's such a big idea that it will never happen
>>> >
>>> >5. That we should hurry up and present our alternative model
>>> >
>>> >6. That we could help with the peer review
>>> >
>>> >7. The peer review ought to be evidence based, and we can help with
>>> >thinking about that as we have an active reserach programme in peer
>>> >review
>>> >
>>> >8. We should combine with other publishers and do our own Godzilla
>>> >
>>> >9. We're all doomed and it's time to head for the Isle of Innisfree
>>> >
>>> >10. Doom could be good for us, prompting the mental juices
>>> >
>>> >Richard (Smith, editor, BMJ - for the benefit of Pat)
>>> >
>>> >